

BEST PRACTICES CROSSING THE PACIFIC: SECURITY SECTOR DEVELOPMENT FROM THE ANDES TO ASIA



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As the Asia-Pacific region continues its momentous rise in the twenty-first century, issues of internal security sector governance and security sector transformation have become increasingly paramount. While many Asia-Pacific states in the area of security sector development serve as rich laboratories of best practices in reshaping the modern relationships of civil-military relations, security practitioners in Asia-Pacific states would do well by evaluating models outside of the Western, European, and African regions, turning their focus also to South American case studies. Indeed, perhaps the pivotal example in successful Asia-Pacific security sector development resides in Chile, where modern civil-military relations have catapulted Chilean society and government out of a period of moral anguish, political contestation, and overarching military oversight to the point where a thriving relationship is emerging between the military, civil-society, legal and political institutions. Chile serves as a salient example not only for its dedicated commitment to re-constituting the balance between military and civilian representatives, but in carefully nurturing a discourse that has allowed both sides to understand over a process of twenty-five years both how and where mutual respect, accommodation, and reconciliation are found. Present in Chile today is to a large degree a fully consolidated democratic relationship born from a deliberate process of modernizing state institutions alongside the social necessities of a demanding middle class citizenry.

Three areas of Chilean security sector reform stand out for Asia-Pacific states to take note of. The first involves the emergence of legislative openness and political inclusion in Chile from the original restrictive framework set out in the 1980 constitution which favored high levels of military presence in politics. The second involves the realization by all sides of the Chilean security sector and public sphere that mutual, shared understandings are the key variable to advancing democratic civil-military reforms such that the core ideas about security and defense are made transparent and understandable to all sides as new security institutions and policy are developed. The third reflects the enhanced role placed on the key civilian institution, the Ministry of Defense (MOD), to include the difficult turn taken in Chile to allow the military to develop an increased appreciation for how the MOD assists in promoting Chilean security and defense policy more broadly. This area is critical for all Asia-Pacific states as the Chilean MOD filled deeply indispensable functions in the military's quest to be understood and have its own institutional interests incorporated into Chile's changing security and political landscape. All

three areas serve as best practices for Asia-Pacific states to consider as they consolidate and institutionalize civil-military relations in a modern security context. We shall discuss these in turn.

Firstly, one of the great narratives of Chile's democratic transformation is that it has defied the dark predictions of many analysts who saw the institutional origins of Chilean authoritarianism as largely impossible to surpass. Most commentators viewed Augusto Pinochet's institutional legacy (1973-1989) as placing Chile along a political pathway that offered very little chance of democratic emergence. This was due to many factors, to include Pinochet's personal role in constructing the 1980 Constitution and 1989 Organic Law of the Armed Forces; an expanded role of military autonomy in government and legislative positions; the military's task in enforcing social norms and ideological guidelines for society; the Presidential power to dismiss and appoint military leadership; and the ability to shield from view military spending and procurement processes. Elected civilian politicians, following the peaceful transfer of power to civil-society in the early 1990s, were considered by most to be exceptionally constrained in reversing policies and law that favored military priorities and interests.

However, even in the most institutionally entrenched of areas of security policy, elements of democratization in Chile have appeared. Whereas the military was formerly granted four of nine seats in the senate, filled by former chiefs of each military service and the head of the national police, two of seven seats in the Constitutional Tribunal, and a majority in the National Security Council, all of these policies have been removed over time. Through the slow process of negotiation and alliance building over the a twenty year period, coupled with significant momentum of civil society to drive forward political will, both forces chipped away at Chile's entrenched military interests to eventually culminate in 2005 in sweeping changes to most areas of civil-military oversight. To be sure, critical domains of minimal civilian control remain, the most important of which remains the non-public nature of military budgeting and procurement. But in contemporary Chilean defense dialogues, military, civilian, and political leaders have promised to place this issue under full examination and move towards a transparent budgeting process. There is also a push to remove the state funded Copper mining provision (CODELCO) - which mandated a fixed 10% amount of copper revenue for strictly military procurement - and replace it with normal military spending patterns based upon security priorities and a broader evaluation of public services. In short, the institutional rigidity that characterized the Chilean transitional process has not stultified security sector development in key areas of political and judicial decision-making. Rather, the through a slow process of legislative and bureaucratic reform, military prerogatives became over time slowly watered down to reflect civilian interests and input. In uncovering the drivers behind these events, part of the explanation of political-legal modernization involves Chile's firm commitment to produce shared understandings between the military and civil society on the evolution of future Chilean security issues.

Secondly, one of the common positions voiced in Asia-Pacific countries is that neither the military nor civilian side understands the other's position on security affairs and defense

priorities. Many military personal characterize modern civilian bureaucrats as unable to comprehend the complexities of security and defense planning and thus incapable of providing coherent and effective civilian oversight. Accordingly, many civilians argue that military officials are unwilling to give up control over military practices largely because of entrenched budgetary and personal economic interests, but also given that contemporary security debates structured by military thinking remain unreflective of the real security issues citizen's face on a daily basis. These divisive positions in Asia-Pacific contexts have become hardened over time and produce a constant friction between the two sides in security dialogues, planning and decision-making. The lessons from Chile again paint another possible perspective from which to draw on.

Chilean civilian and military personal made a conscious decision in the 1990s to subject their positions on security and defense to the scrutiny of the other side, publicly articulating concerns in order to discover where shared understandings could be found and common ground built upon. In order to flourish, the public debate on democratic transformation in the early 1990s needed to incorporate military thinking, lessons of military sociology, and strategic terminology in order for a common lexicon to be established between both sides. Indeed, it is the necessity of generating a common grammar, or intersubjective use of terms and beliefs between civilians and the military, that drove the Chilean debate about security affairs forward and allowed for a productive set of iterations on Defense Policy to take shape and culminate in the formal Defense Strategy of 2012. Because Chile prioritized a permanent process of civilian-military dialogue based upon common understandings and placed at the core of the democratic transition process the need to dampen civilian-military frictions, Chilean security dialogues today reflect the plural interests of all sides of the security and political sectors. Such interaction has not only placed on the agenda over decades key issues of civilian control, but allowed the military to understand the real benefits of civilian decision-making as undertaken by a modern MOD.

Thirdly, it is commonly lamented in many Asia-Pacific states that the MOD is a powerless, understaffed, poorly funded institution which contributes little to security dialogues and strategic thought. Moreover, there are several examples within Asia-Pacific where the MOD is an unknown entity, both in substance and physical location. Chile once again has managed to move beyond this common dilemma in institutional development through a deliberate, focused discussion that prioritizes military incentives and functional defense planning. Because the MOD in the early 1990s was considered a marginal organization of little authority and was accordingly sidestepped by the military in their decision-making, the need to bring together the ideas of civilian and military personal toward finding collective ground became imperative. The real conundrum in Chilean public security debates became to uncover what incentives structured the institutional interests of the military, and thus how to construct a constant communications flow with the MOD. Part of this incentive involved having a person, in this case the Minister of Defense, to serve as a conduit through which the military could discuss defense issues, but also to function as a single person who could be seen symbolically as an authority in defense matters.

The Minister of Defense thus came to be seen as the central person not only to bring together the civilian and ministry sides, but one in possession of an important functional characteristic that the military required: that of serving as a buffer, or bridge between other competing government organizations. In this context, the MOD began to function as an intermediary between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Interior, allowing the military to voice its concerns through a central organization rather than have to deal with each ministry individually.

Perhaps most importantly, the MOD cultivated a role in relation to the military as its ‘facilitator’ in solving interagency challenges, a ‘representative’ to address military problems, a ‘translator’ of defense issues of detailed specificity that could operationalize policy objectives, a ‘broker’ between the government agencies, and critically, a ‘shield’ from which criticism of the military could be blunted. In short, the MOD allowed the military to be understood on its own terms to its civilian counterparts and have its institutional interests embedded within the shirting security dialogue unfolding. Without doubt, the careful stewardship of then Minister of Defense (2002-2004), and current President, Michele Bachelet, paved the way for significant reforms to take place in the MOD in 2010 to include the creation of a Joint Chief of Staff and development of Joint Doctrine. But the significance for the Asia-Pacific in utilizing the lessons for the rise of Chile’s modernization of its MOD lie in the MOD’s functional use to the military as the latter continued to adapt to the social, normative, and institutional pressures that accompanied Chile’s democratic transition from authoritarianism.

In 2014, under the new Bachelet administration Chile is beginning to negotiate the last elements of a divided space of civil-military relations between an expanded civil society and one of the world’s most professional armed forces and police sectors. These include the final negotiations to put in place transparent procurement policies for the military, regular military spending cycles subject to democratic deliberation, delineating the roles and responsibilities of the armed forces and military in internal security issues, and the utility of a National Security Advisor to shape National Security Strategy and Defense Planning. All of this is occurring as Chile begins its constant process of looking east to the Asian side of the Asia-Pacific, harnessing the benefits of the Chinese and Asian markets, and leading by example in South America in relation to what norms of good governance and industrial policy look like in practice. As the development of Chile’s security sector indicates, the noteworthy examples of institutional change in legislative areas to find balance between civilian and military perspectives, the common goal to harness mutual understandings between both sides, and the necessity of utilizing the MOD for the purposes of locking in civilian authority and functional military necessity, all of these milestones serve as best practices that key Asia-Pacific states should take note of in their own security sector development processes.

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